FREE GUIDE

10 GarageBand Hacks for Better Vocals

Ten moves, in the order you would make them, using what is already inside GarageBand.

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Before you start

Hey, Warren here. Thanks for your order. This guide is a free bonus, and it is yours to keep.

GarageBand is free and it can handle a full vocal mix. Most weak vocals in it come from a level that was too hot, too much EQ or too much reverb. These 10 hacks fix those problems with the tools GarageBand already has.

Work through them in order. The order is the vocal chain: record, comp, start from a patch, EQ, compress, de-ess, tune, add space, tighten layers, then check it against the beat.

Every number in this guide is a starting point. Your voice, mic and room are different, so move each setting by ear. Toggle a plug-in off and on and match the loudness, so you judge the tone and not the volume.

The steps are written for GarageBand on Mac. On iPhone and iPad the effects have the same names, with the controls behind the track settings. Layouts change between versions, so check the screen on your own device.

Warren

HACK 01 OF 10

Record low and dry

Level and room decide how good a vocal can sound. A clipped take cannot be repaired, and a reverb you hear while recording cannot be removed later. Fix both before you open a single effect.

EXACT STEPS

1. Choose your microphone in GarageBand > Settings > Audio/MIDI.
2. Create an audio track and choose the right input.
3. Sing your loudest line and watch the meter. Lower the interface gain until that line peaks between -12 and -6 dB. If the meter turns red, lower it more and record again.
4. Wear closed headphones and turn the beat down in your headphone mix, so it does not bleed into the mic.
5. Record with no reverb or echo on the track.

FAST SETTING

Loudest line peaks at -12 to -6 dB. Closed headphones. No effects while you record.

HACK 02 OF 10

Loop it, keep the best phrases

Comping often improves a vocal more than any plug-in. It takes about ten minutes. The takes you do not use also give you doubles and harmonies for free.

EXACT STEPS

1. Turn on Cycle and set the loop over one verse or chorus.
2. Press record and sing three passes. Each pass stacks as a take in a folder.
3. Click a take to choose it for each phrase. Join the best phrases into one finished vocal.
4. Name the winning take so you can find it later.
5. Keep the unused takes until the song is done.

> **FAST SETTING**
>
> Cycle on, three passes, click the best take for each phrase, name the winner.

HACK 03 OF 10

Start from a Voice patch

A patch stores a whole chain of effects and settings. Starting from a patch that is close to your sound is faster than building from an empty track. Then you fix only what you hear.

EXACT STEPS

1. Select your vocal track and press Y to open the Library.
2. Pick a patch from the Voice category that matches your style. Try two or three.
3. Press B to open Smart Controls. Use the Master Echo and Master Reverb sliders for a quick first balance.
4. Click the Plug-ins and EQ button to see what the patch actually loads. This is the chain you will adjust in the next hacks.
5. Change one control at a time. Three small moves at once hide which one helped.

FAST SETTING

Pick a patch, then fix the three things you hear: EQ, Compressor, echo and reverb.

SHORTCUT

The Starter Pack of 3 best-selling vocal presets for GarageBand gives you three patches to start from, for $19. See it on thir13een.com

HACK 04 OF 10

Cut the mud with EQ

Each EQ move solves one problem a listener hears even if they cannot name it. Cut first and lift last. A close mic in a small room piles up energy around 250 to 400 Hz, and it sounds like talking into a cardboard box.

EXACT STEPS

1. Click the Plug-ins and EQ button in Smart Controls and open Visual EQ for the vocal. Use Channel EQ if you want to type exact values.
2. Remove everything below 80 to 120 Hz with a high-pass (low cut). Your room, desk and breath live down there.
3. Cut 2 to 3 dB between 250 and 400 Hz if the voice sounds boxy.
4. Lift 1.5 to 3 dB between 3 and 5 kHz so the words come forward.
5. Add +1 to +2 dB high shelf above about 10 kHz only if the recording is not hissy.
6. Switch the EQ off and on and match the loudness before you decide it helps.

FAST SETTING

High-pass at 80 to 120 Hz. Cut 2 to 3 dB at 250 to 400 Hz. Lift 1.5 to 3 dB at 3 to 5 kHz.

HACK 05 OF 10

Compress lightly

A compressor evens out the loud and quiet words so the lyric stays audible. Heavy compression squashes the voice. A vocal that jumps out of the mix usually needs a higher threshold, not more compression.

EXACT STEPS

1. In the Plug-ins section of Smart Controls, add the Compressor after the EQ.
2. Set the ratio to 3:1 with a medium attack and a medium release.
3. Lower the threshold until the loudest words reduce by 3 to 4 dB. Watch the gain reduction meter.
4. If the meter sits at 8 to 10 dB on every line, lower the ratio or raise the threshold.
5. If the vocal sounds flat after compression, lower the ratio.

> **FAST SETTING**
> Ratio 3:1, medium attack and release, 3 to 4 dB of reduction on the loudest words.

HACK 06 OF 10

De-ess with a narrow EQ cut

Compression and a presence lift make S and T sounds louder. Check your version first, because some versions of GarageBand have no de-esser. A narrow EQ cut near 5 to 8 kHz does the same job.

EXACT STEPS

1. Add a second Channel EQ after the Compressor.
2. Make a narrow boost of about 6 dB and sweep it between 5 and 8 kHz while the vocal plays. The harshest S sound is where the boost sounds worst.
3. Turn that band into a cut of 2 to 3 dB. Keep the band narrow.
4. Compare with the EQ off. If the S now sounds like a lisp, make the cut smaller.

FAST SETTING

Narrow cut of 2 to 3 dB at the harsh frequency, between 5 and 8 kHz.

HACK 07 OF 10

Tune lightly

GarageBand has a built-in pitch correction control for audio regions. Use a light touch. Heavy correction gives the stepped, hard-tuned effect, which is a style choice and not a fix.

EXACT STEPS

1. Double-click the vocal region to open the audio editor.
2. Turn on Limit to Key and set the key of your song if the option is there.
3. Raise the Correction slider slowly until the off notes settle without the voice sounding robotic.
4. Stop as soon as it sounds natural. Then play the whole song to check.

FAST SETTING

Limit to Key on. Raise Correction slowly and stop where off notes settle.

SHORTCUT

For the hard-tuned sound on purpose, the Auto-Tune Vocal Preset for GarageBand covers subtle correction up to the hard-tuned effect with built-in GarageBand effects. See it on thir13een.com

HACK 08 OF 10

Echo and reverb, low

Echo and reverb add space and depth. They go last in the chain. Master Echo and Master Reverb are shared across your tracks, so every vocal layer sits in the same room.

EXACT STEPS

1. Press B to open Smart Controls on the vocal track.
2. Start with the Master Echo and Master Reverb sliders at the lowest setting.
3. Raise the reverb until you notice it only when you mute it. Keep it short for rap and pop.
4. Raise the echo until the repeats sit quietly behind the voice. A little echo on line ends works well for rap.
5. If the words wash out, shorten the reverb and lower the level.

FAST SETTING

Reverb you notice only when you mute it. Echo repeats low.

HACK 09 OF 10

Tighten doubles with Flex Time

A single vocal can feel thin on a chorus. A double fixes that, but only if it is tight. A loose double sounds like a mistake. Flex Time lets you line up the words.

EXACT STEPS

1. Duplicate your best vocal track (Track > Duplicate Track). Pan the two tracks slightly apart.
2. Open the audio editor on the double and turn on Flex. Choose Flex Time.
3. Find a word that starts late. Drag its flex marker so it starts with the same word in the lead.
4. Give ad-libs less presence and more reverb so they sit behind the lead.
5. Mute the layers now and then to check that the lead alone still works. If playback stutters on an older Mac or iPhone, render the finished vocal to a single track.

FAST SETTING

Pan the double slightly, line up late words with Flex Time, check the lead alone.

HACK 10 OF 10

Beat check, then save it

A vocal that sounds perfect solo often disappears in the full mix. Set the level with the beat playing. Then save the chain as a patch so the next song starts from a good place.

EXACT STEPS

1. Play the whole song and set the vocal level with the beat on.
2. If the vocal fights the beat, cut 1 to 2 dB from the beat around 2 to 4 kHz. This makes room without touching the vocal.
3. Check the mix on small speakers, headphones and a phone. The lyric must stay clear on all three.
4. Leave headroom on the master. Export when the loudest part stays below 0 dB.
5. Open the Library, click Save and name the patch. It appears under User Patches, ready for the next song.

FAST SETTING

Beat -1 to -2 dB around 2 to 4 kHz. Master below 0 dB. Save the patch.

SHORTCUT

Thir13een presets for GarageBand are patch files, so they load from the same place as your own saved patch. Each one still needs small level changes for your voice. See it on thir13een.com

YOUR MOVE

The live deal

Buy 1 GarageBand preset, get 1 free

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Vocal Preset Mega Bundle for GarageBand, $49

Every vocal preset in the GarageBand catalog, in one download. Built-in GarageBand effects only, so there is nothing else to buy.

Get the Mega Bundle

https://www.thir13een.com/products/vocal-preset-mega-bundle-garageband?utm_source=guide&utm_medium=pdf&utm_campaign=garageband_hacks

These were the live offers on the day this guide was written, November 2026. The page shows today's offer. Presets are starting points: each one needs small level changes for your voice and mic.

Thanks for reading. Warren